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Meeting Minutes – Steering Committee Kick-Off Meeting

I-35E MnPASS Extension Study

(SP 6281-46)

Thursday, September 19, 2013, 9:00 to 11:00 am
Hugo City Hall

1. **Welcome and Introductions**

   Scott McBride (MnDOT Metro District) welcomed the Steering Committee members and gave a brief introduction of what MnPASS is and the need for this study. He explained that the increasing congestion in the Twin Cities and in this corridor has led MnDOT to look at different concepts to improve traffic through the corridor. Scott then introduced Brad Larsen who discussed the meeting's agenda and the role of the Steering Committee for this project. He explained the role of the Steering Committee is to review and provide feedback on study component methodology, findings and conclusions; provide participant recommendations for various study components; and communicate the study's purpose, approach and results to other officials and stakeholders in committee members' communities.

2. **Schedule**

   Brad gave a short description of the proposed schedule for this project. This included dates for the Steering Committee meetings for the project as well as the dates that preliminary results and the final draft will be due. He also mentioned that the Technical Advisory Committees for the different study components will meet periodically throughout the September 2013 – November 2014 timeframe.

3. **MnPASS Background and Study Overview**

   Brad gave background information on MnPASS and managed lanes history in Minnesota. He explained that MnPASS is one of the strategies that has been introduced to address transportation system challenges such as aging infrastructure, rising costs, tight fiscal constraints, and overall Twin Cities congestion. He discussed the different types of priced managed lanes (e.g. typical, reversible, and PDSLs (Priced Dynamic Shoulder Lanes), the brand name for which in Minnesota are MnPASS Express Lanes. He also mentioned the different types of non-priced managed lanes (e.g. HOV lanes, Smart Lanes, and Dynamic Shoulder Lanes).

   He explained that MnPASS lanes typically only operate during rush hour periods. During those times, transit buses, carpools with two or more passengers and motorcycles can use the lanes for free. Single occupant vehicles can use the lane for a fee that ranges from $0.25 to $8.00, with an average of $1.61 per trip. The purpose of the pricing is to maintain the congestion-free condition in the lane and better utilize the lane capacity.

Brad also summarized the considerable improvements that are coming to the I-35E corridor north of St. Paul such as pavement improvements, bridge replacements, access modifications, new park and rides, bike/pedestrian improvements, and the addition of a MnPASS lane in each direction on the inside of I-35E between Cayuga St. and little Canada Rd.

He concluded by providing an overview of the I-35E MnPASS Extension Study. This study will develop and evaluate concept options for extending MnPASS lanes on I-35E between Little Canada Rd. and County Road 96. The study will also identify and evaluate methods for improving bus transit and carpool use in the MnPASS lanes on I-35E. Although MnPASS lanes are only under construction on I-35E to Little Canada Rd., the regional transportation planning vision for MnPASS on this corridor extends north of Little Canada Rd. Consequently, this study will look at the next I-35E segment north of Little Canada Rd. on which a future construction opportunity exists for extending MnPASS.

This study is being made possible by a Federal Value Pricing Pilot Program grant of $605,000. There are three main components to the study: Concept Development, Community Outreach & Education, and Land Use & Transit Enhancement. Brad gave a brief description of each and introduced the leadership for each component. Parsons Brinckerhoff will be conducting the Concept Development, the University of Minnesota's Hubert H. Humphrey School of Public Affairs will be conducting the Community Outreach & Education, and the University of Minnesota's Center for Changing Landscapes will be handling the Land Use & Transit Enhancement component. A representative from each group gave a presentation following the introduction.

Discussion:
Steering Committee members were curious about the number of MnPASS violations that have been observed on other corridors since implementation. What keeps a customer honest when using the MnPASS? Scott McBride responded that two factors apply: one, the customer can be pulled over and cited for not meeting the requirements, and, two, if a customer cheats earlier on the system by avoiding the initial toll zone, the price may go up and he would be paying more than if he had stayed honest. MnDOT reported that although they don't have a firm number, it is estimated that MnPASS violations make up around 5%-15% of the MnPASS trips.

One member asked if the "average price" reported by MnDOT on the existing MnPASS corridors were average prices charged, or, price signed. Brad replied that it was the average price charged.

Committee members also expressed the need to clearly state the "givens" for this project to explain to the pubic why the managed lanes concept is the one currently under evaluation. Brad said that one given is this corridor is designated as a managed lanes corridor in the state and regional transportation plans. It was also mentioned that the land use "givens" could be

conveyed to the public, like the park and rides that will be going in along the corridor. Transit ridership and park and ride use have both gone up 27% on the I-35W corridor since MnPASS was implemented. MnDOT agreed to develop a document of the givens for the project and the corridor and share it with the Steering Committee

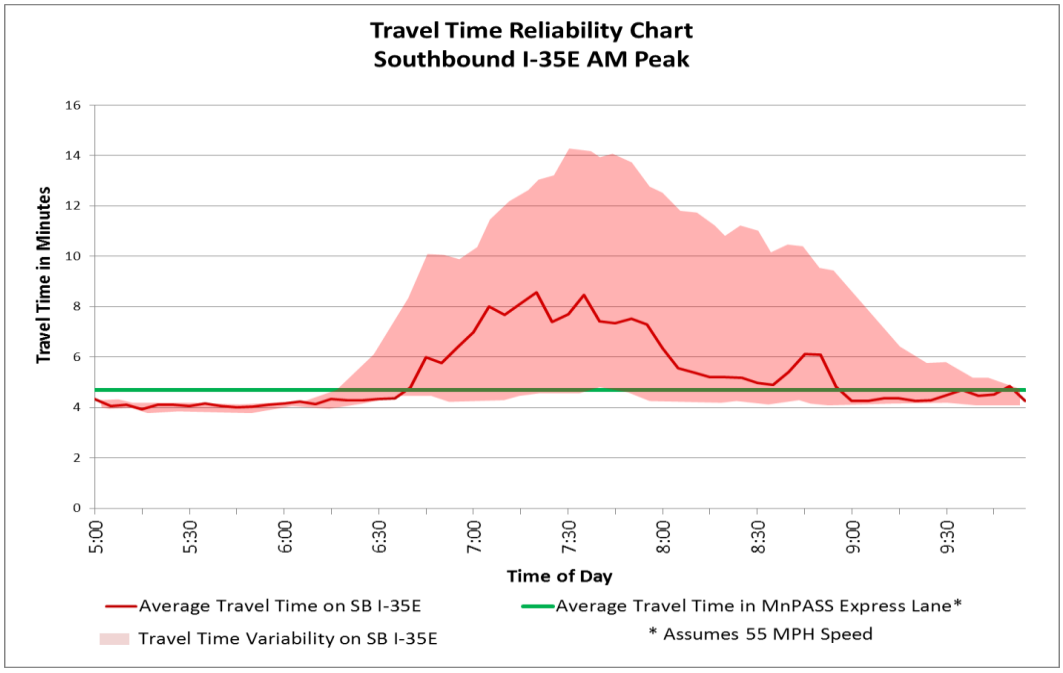
4. Concept Development

Peter Muehlbach from Parsons Brinckerhoff was then introduced and stated he would walk through the scope of work to clearly set up the parameters of the study. He discussed the process for successful evaluation of the developed concepts. This includes the Purpose and Need, Traffic Impact Analysis, Transit Potential, System Operation, and Physical Impact Analysis. Firmly establishing the purpose and need for this study will be a key aspect of the process. An example of Traffic Impact Analysis would be to run a traffic model for two concepts of adding a MnPASS lane and a No Build scenario. For the Transit Potential aspect, Parsons Brinckerhoff will work with the Met Council, Metro Transit and Mary Vogel with the University of Minnesota's Center for Changing Landscapes to discuss the potential. All of these aspects will lead to a comparison of options through a Benefit/Cost Analysis.

The tasks of this study include documenting the needs between Little Canada Road and County Road 96, developing systems operations management strategies, identifying, analyzing and preparing a cost estimate for different MnPASS extension concepts, and producing a benefit/cost for each concept.

Peter then illustrated the Priced Dynamic Shoulder Lane (PSDL) operation, which is one of the identified MnPASS extension concepts, and how it and other concepts would be considered through this study. This includes developing a traffic forecast for 2015 and 2030 for high occupancy vehicles, single occupancy vehicles, and transit demand, developing a model for existing conditions and two identified concepts, creating a results matrix from model output for evaluating each concept, and combining the cost estimate and results matrix to identify the concept that has the best cost ratio. He mentioned the different concepts that will be investigated; including a discontinuous MnPASS lane in the I-35E / I-694 commons (also known as "Unweave the Weave"), a priced dynamic shoulder, a peak period left lane conversion, and a hybrid of any of these concepts.

Next Peter discussed the existing conditions of the study area. He reported a level of service for southbound AM peak to be LOS D-F and northbound PM peak to be LOS D-E. He also stated that we will be expecting increasing congestion by 2015. Peter then provided an animation of the existing traffic congestion during AM and PM peak periods using the PEMS software for September 10, 2013. This showed varying congestion through the study area during peak hours. Peter then showed a chart displaying travel time reliability through the study area. This showed a large range of travel times, which can lead to around 10 minutes of lost time when accounting for actual travel time delay and "planning time" for worst-case condition traffic. A MnPASS lane would mean always having a reliable trip time.



Peter then discussed consistency with regional transportation planning. He discussed two applicable planning studies, the Metropolitan Highway System Investment Study (2010) and the MnPASS System Study Phase 2 (2010). He also mentioned the 2030 Regional Transportation Policy Plan (2010), the Statewide Multimodal Transportation Plan (2012), and MnDOT's 20-year State Highway Investment Plan (Fall 2013) as applicable transportation plans.
The applicable studies have rated the I-35E corridor for high cost effectiveness and high opportunity for development of MnPASS in the corridor north of the MnPASS lanes currently under construction on I-35E, contributing to the purpose and need for the study.

Discussion:
Referencing the newly constructed shoulder in the I-694 / I-35E commons, the first question asked by a Steering Committee member was when we take away some shoulder for a MnPASS lane, how do we ensure safety? Peter explained that having less congestion leads to fewer accidents and less people would need to use the shoulder. In the other places MnPASS has been implemented, we haven't seen a negative impact. MnPASS improves flow through the corridor which increases safety. The Concept Development aspect of this study looks at incident strategies as a component of design.

Participants of this meeting were also inquired whether there is adequate thickness of pavement on the shoulder to handle a MnPASS lane. Peter explained that we believe there is based on past experience, but we will need to investigate as part of the engineering analysis.

Participants also asked what the level of service breakdown was. Peter explained that around a LOS E, congestion gets volatile, and the LOS breakdown is similar to a normal grading system.

We shoot for a LOS C during congestion, and the MnPASS prices are adjusted to get to ideal LOS C.

A Steering Committee member also asked if we would be using other construction in the area to implement MnPASS. Peter confirmed this by saying we will be using the bridge replacement and pavement work as an opportunity to implement a new MnPASS lane.

A Steering Committee member also brought up that there are significant slowdowns well before County Road 96 every morning. Peter informed the group that although the study geometry is from Little Canada Road to County Road 96, we will be doing a traffic analysis all the way to County Road 14.

Finally a Steering Committee member asked if there is any plan to alleviate congestion around I-694 where it always backs up. Peter explained that MnPASS will not eliminate all congestion in the general purpose lanes, but it will improve overall traffic flow and give commuters a congestion free alternative.

5. Community Dialogues

Next, Lee Munich from the University of Minnesota's Humphrey School of Public Affairs was introduced to present on the Community Dialogues. He explained that we need to cater to the area we are in. This is important because there is not a lot of knowledge of MnPASS in this area, despite the ongoing operations on I-35W and I-394 in the Twin Cities. He explained that there will be Community Dialogue sessions in which there will be bi-directional information flow between the facilitator and the participants, thereby obtaining input from the community on the different concept options. The sessions will have three parts. The first part will be a brief overview of MnPASS plans and results so far. The second part will be an overview of the concept options. The final part will include participant input on the different concept options.

Lee informed the committee that the next Steering Committee meeting will walk committee members through this process. Lee explained that MnPASS mainly operates in the West Metro, so for Part 1 a simple infographic overview of MnPASS will be given to participants to provide a brief explanation of what MnPASS is. In Part 2 of the sessions, the facilitator will actively engage the participants with concepts. In Part 3, the facilitator will pose open-ended questions to get feedback on the perceived benefits of each concept, the perceived concerns of each concept, and any additional issues or needs. The facilitator will also field questions or clarifications from the participants. The dialogue sessions will consist of 8-12 people. Lee also said there will be open houses in the future to get the public involved.

Discussion:
Committee members were wondering if enough has been done with the general public to gain approval, in light of the outreach efforts conducted for the metropolitan transportation plan. A member asked, "Has the decision already been made for the public on MnPASS?" Committee

members also asked how we will address the "Lexus Lanes" and "Social Engineering" complaints from both ends of the spectrum. Emily Saunoi-Sandgren, the Humphrey School's facilitator, stated that the question of whether or not this is the best method is not the question we need to ask. The decision has already been made that MnPASS is the identified strategy for this corridor, and now we must determine what is the most desired managed lane concept option.

Committee members were also wondering what percent of the public supports MnPASS lanes. Presenters indicated that one-third of the public support the strategy, one-quarter oppose, and the rest fall somewhere in the middle. Presenters suggested that we put together a Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) sheet to help the public understand why a MnPASS lane is the identified strategy for I-35E. They also stated that current policy would only allow a MnPASS lane, and there is no option to add an additional general purpose lane. Presenters indicated that in other MnPASS corridors, people had to see MnPASS in operation before they supported it. Presenters are not expecting the public to be on board right away. Committee members would like the process to be ready to accommodate the general public's lack of knowledge of traffic management.

Presenters explained that the goal is to engage the public along the corridor and not just have a general survey. They are expecting around 120 participants. The committee likes the visuals showing congestion through the corridor from the PeMS software and believes it would be good to show participants to depict how MnPASS will make an improvement.

Committee members do not like the fact that the study only covers up to County Road 96 because there are many communities north of this point who experience congestion along the corridor.

A committee member asked what the data inputs will be because the forecasting numbers can oftentimes be off. He would like the most accurate forecasting numbers. Peter indicated that we will be using the most recent forecasting data. The committee member recommended not using any data that hasn't been approved by local governments.

The team will lead a mock run through of the community session at the next Committee meeting to allow feedback and adjustments to the format before they are conducted.

6. Land Use and Transit Enhancement

Next Mary Vogel presented on behalf of the University of Minnesota's Center for Changing Landscapes. She explained that transportation decisions impact the communities in the area. She informed the committee that her group will be choosing three sites in the area and will research how adding a MnPASS lane will affect these areas. She would like the committee's feedback on suitable sites to research. She is also looking for suggestions for people to be a part of the Technical Advisory Committee. She stated that each project has its own needs that need to be considered.

Discussion:
Committee members asked for an example of a site to research. Mary suggested the new park and ride facilities and areas surrounding County Road 96. She also indicated that these sites are not limited to areas between Little Canada Road and County Road 96.

7. Future Meetings and Final Discussion

Presenters indicated that the next meeting will likely be during the first full week of January. This will be a longer meeting that will go more in depth into the concepts of the study. Presenters asked the committee members if there is interest in touring the existing MnPASS facilities, and to let Brad know if there is interest.